

# Buddhism

Buddhism began in the 500s B.C.E in India. It is generally thought of as a “spiritual tradition” more than a religion although some people *do* think of it as a religion, and others think of it as a philosophy. Buddhists do not worship a personal god. However, they do strive to follow the path of the Buddha. The Buddha was a title given to a man whose real name was Siddharta Gautama. He's thought to be the founder of Buddhism. He was a prince in India from a very rich family, however he knew little of suffering or sickness. He ultimately left his life of comfort to seek “enlightenment” or a spiritual awakening. After sitting under a Bodhi tree for much time meditating, he is said to have reach “enlightenment”—this means one is completely detached from the things of this world and has this kind of inner peace and freedom. The purpose of life is to strive for enlightenment. Until you reach the state of enlightenment, you are reborn again and again. Thus, Buddhists believe in reincarnation.

## Christianity

Christianity is a monotheistic religion that began in the 1<sup>st</sup> century C.E. It began in the area that is now known as Israel or Syria, and it grew out of Judaism. Most people say Christianity began with the death of Jesus Christ, which was roughly around 30 or 33 C.E. Jesus Christ is also said to be the founder of the religion, and St. Paul is credited with spreading it and really helping to establish the Christian Church. Christians generally believe that how one lives this life determines their fate in the next life: if one lives virtuously and shows love, kindness, and mercy to others and obedience to God's laws in the Bible, that person is promised Paradise, or Heaven in the next world. However, hell fire is said to await those who do not live of virtue.

## Confucianism

Confucianism is a spiritual tradition, and some people even call it a philosophy since it does not focus on a belief in God/gods. It originated in China during the 500s B.C.E., and it centered on an educator known as Confucius (his Chinese name was Kong Qiu). Confucius lived from 552-479 B.C.E., and although he was not well known during his lifetime, his writings are the basis of this spiritual tradition. The main teaching of Confucianism is treat others with respect, especially one's elders (your parents and teachers and older siblings). To live a "good life" meant to have good social interactions with others and fulfill your obligations and responsibilities to others and to your community. A person should do this for the sake of it, and not because of a reward in an afterlife.

# Taoism

Taoism literally means “Teaching the Way”, which generally means teach the truth and accept the truth. It is thought of as both a religion and a philosophy. There are many “small” gods in Taoism, although people do not necessarily worship these gods, and many of these gods are borrowed from other cultures. Taoists believe the world comes from the “Tao”: the Tao, or “The Way” is thought of as an eternal energy source, and part of one’s goal is to submit to that eternal energy source. There is no belief in life after death: death is the final step toward achieving complete unity with nature. One famous symbol associated with Taoism is the Yin/Yang symbol, which symbolizes the complimentary forces of nature.

Taoism began in China, probably around the 600s B.C.E., and many of the teachings come from Lao Tzu, a Chinese poet and philosopher.

# Hinduism

Hinduism is a religion that originated in India perhaps around 1000 B.C.E. There is not really a single founder; it developed mostly from various cultures in Central India. It is neither polytheistic nor monotheistic, but rather, it's *henotheistic*. This means that there is a supreme God (Vishnu) but other lesser gods are also acknowledged. Hindus believe in reincarnation: after death, your spirit can be reborn into another form. Ideally, eventually you will not be reborn

**and your spirit will instead become one with God.**

## **Islam**

**Islam is a monotheistic religion that began in 622 C.E. in Arabia. Its followers recognize the prophet Muhammad as the most recent and final prophet from God. They also recognize previous prophets from God, including Abraham, Adam, Moses, Jesus, and David.**

**Muhammad is also seen as the founder of the faith. While on earth, the Prophet Muhammad revealed a**

**holy book, and that is the Qur'an.  
This world is seen as preparation for  
the next life, because how you live in  
this life determines your fate in the  
next, whether or not your soul will  
enjoy Paradise.**

## **Judaism**

**Judaism is a monotheistic religion that  
began around 1200 B.C.E in Mesopotamia  
(Egypt). Its founder is the prophet  
Abraham, and another prophet Moses later  
helped to spread the faith. Moses also  
helped to compile the Torah, which is the  
holy book of Judaism. The primary focus  
within Judaism is on this life and  
recognizing and honoring the fact that God  
created the universe and creation is good.  
There is an afterlife, including the promise**

**of Paradise, but there is not a whole lot of description of a “hell”.**